Editorial and Opinion

Discrimination against gays is inappropriate

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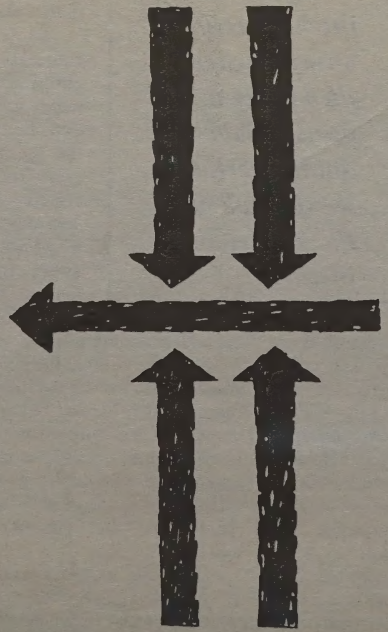
It is now settled that the people of Colorado will be asked to vote on Amendment 2 this coming November. As outlined in Jennifer Munch's article on the stand taken by the Colorado Catholic Conference in this issue of the *Herald*, this amendment calls for action disallowing any future legislation granting special status to homosexual persons similar to the afforded members of minorities. If you have not yet read Jennifer's article, I recommend you do so before continuing this column.

The Conference, comprised of the three Catholic bishops of Colorado, does not intend to tell Catholics how to vote on this or any other issue. Rather, we hope to share with our people the principles upon which they can base their own decision in the voting booth.

Particularly during this time of debate I call on all of us to be sensitive to the needs and the feelings of homosexual people and their families.

Toward this end, I would like to share again some of the church's teaching regarding homosexuality and the status of homosexual persons in our church and society. I will draw from a Thinking Out Loud column which I wrote in May of 1991.

So, while supporting the rights of homosexual persons to full and equal life in our community, the church does not support homosexual behavior which she considers sinful.



I begin by quoting extensively from the American Bishops' recent pastoral letter entitled Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning.

"Mindful of the inherent and abiding dignity of every human person, we affirm what we wrote in 1976, namely that "homosexual (persons), like everyone else, should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights. They have a right to respect, friendship, and justice. They should have an active role in the Christian community.

"We echo strongly the Congregation for The Doctrine of the Faith, which in a 1986 document stated, 'It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the church's pastors wherever it occurs.'

"We call on all Christians and citizens of good will to confront their own fears about homosexuality and to curb the humor and discrimination that offend homosexual persons. We understand that having a homosexual orientation brings with it enough anxiety, pain and issues related to self-acceptance without society adding additional prejudicial treatment.

"However, we also want to express clearly the church's teaching that 'homosexual (genital) activity, as distinguished for homosexual orientation, is morally wrong.' Such an orientation in itself, because not freely chosen is not sinful. As we have stated several times in this document, we believe that it is only within a heterosexual marital relationship that genital sexual activity is morally acceptable.

"Only in marriage does sexual intercourse symbolize the Creator's dual design, as an act of convenant love, with the potential of co-creating new human life. Therefore, homosexual genital activity is considered immoral. Like heterosexual persons, homosexual men and women are called to give witness to chastity, avoiding, with God's grace, behavior that is wrong for them, heterosexual men or women."

Clearly, it is the teaching of the bishops of our nation that discrimination against homosexual persons is inappropriate. This does not mean, however, that the church binds her members to sympathizing with those who disagree with the church's teaching, as outlined above, regarding acting out homosexual desires.

For example, the church, which has as her mission the teaching of morality, cannot be bound to hire or retain someone who violates in word or action what the church is teaching, be they homosexual or heterosexual. Any legislation violating this right of the church would be opposed by the church.

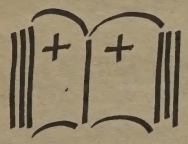
So, while supporting the rights of homosexual persons to full and equal life in our community, the church does not support homosexual behavior which she considers sinful.

All of this brings to light once more the church's dual role as teacher of the ideal, as called for by the Gospel, and healer of the less-than-ideal, also called for by the Gospel. Constantly we must both state the truth of the compassionate understanding of one another's failures and difficulties.

I call on all pastors and others of our faith to work diligently with our homosexual brothers and sisters, and their families, to from the loving and mutually supportive community we profess to be. ✞

Vatican prompting U.S. to decide on confirmation age

Confirmation Continued from Page 3



of rite of passage.

The renewed Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and study into the historical meaning and place of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, have led others to see that confirmation rightfully belongs with the sacraments of initiation.

And so the discussion continues.

Sister Nadine Heimann, OSF, pastoral associate at St. Mary Cathedral, believes that confirmation should be celebrated with the sacraments of initiation. The parish has studied this question in their "Gift Program," and Sister Heimann thinks that most people in the parish would agree with having the sacraments of initiation together.

If a child has not been baptized as an infant, it holds truer to church tradition to have them baptized, confirmed and invited to Eucharist during the Easter Vigil. She does not believe that confirmation is a sacrament of coming of age, or rite of passage.

While teenagers and adults need to experience ongoing conversion and com-mitment, the church needs to deal with this in a separate discussion.

Sister Heimann said that the discussion continues in their parish and that they will do pastorally what is appropriate as situations arise, because the practices will not be clear for some time.

Kerry Susser, who is the director of religious education at St. Mary, concurs with Sister Heimann on the place of confirmation. "The present practise of teenage con-

plishments of Vatican II," she said.

Vatican II made an effort to renew the earlier church traditions. In the early centuries of the church, baptism, confirmation and Eucharist were initiatory sacraments celebrated together during the Easter Vigil service. Over time, as the church grew, it was not always possible to have all of the new converts come together at a single ce-lebration.

Bishops in the Western rite delayed the anointing of the newly baptized until they were able to travel to that area of their diocese. Initially the separation was only a week or so, but with time it grew longer. In the Eastern churches, a separation of the sacraments of initiation did not occur, for the bishops delegated their priests to administer the three initiation sacraments together. This practise still holds today.

Baptism of infants added more confusion to the sacrament's celebration. Vatican Council II took steps to renew the meaning of the sacraments and presented a reformed look at confirmation in 1971 calling for reception at the age of reason, which would be at 7 or 8, the same age as Eucharist. The United States has varied this policy.

Susser believes that people need to know the background and history of these sacraments in order to have a deeper connection and understanding of their life in the church. Such understanding also places a different light upon the importance of children and teenagers presence and participation within

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needs to be reflected upon by the adult and pastoral community, according to Andrea Flake-Simpleman, coordinator of religious education at Peterson Air Force Chapel. "My whole thesis is that if we say the sacraments are worship celebrations of the Christian community, then we need to have community reflection upon their meaning. What is God saying to the community as people of faith?" she said.

Too often the time and reasons for the celebrations of the sacraments are "governed by expediency rather than the Spirit of God," she said. The current age of confirmation is often considered good because it is a way to keep teenagers in the church longer. It does not take into account the historical understanding of confirmation.

She believes that the church community should move toward the integrity of the sacraments of initiation being celebrated together. If a family is living a committed Christian life, baptism of infants would be appropriate, with the family taking responsibility for education and support until the child is age 7 and is ready for confirmation and Eucharist.

If there is no strong support for faith development in the family, then a child could wait until age 7 or whatever age before beginning in the catechumenate to be catechized and fully initiated into the three sacraments.

While Flake-Simpleman is concerned

passage for young adults. She suggested that maybe the church needs to create a special ritual if it is needed.

As youth director of St. Patrick's Parish, Nathan Crawford and the staff at his parish have been involved in much discussion on this topic.

Several years ago the staff decided to not confirm children who were part of the Christian initiation process because of the conflicting message that this sent to other children who had to wait until high school for confirmation.

They have now reconsidered this parish policy because it did not seem in accordance with the revised initiation rites. This next year children who are brought into the church community will follow the same RCIA process as adults.

A formation committee at the parish will continue to spend the next year looking at questions surrounding confirmation and the initiation rites.

Crawford believes that the question of when to confirm individuals should be dealt with in the context of the sacraments of initiation.

"My biggest concern is that the church is not dealing with the right set of questions. Should we be baptizing infants? Do 7 to 8-year-olds need to come to the Table of the Lord to be part of the community? Can people come fully to the Table of the Lord and not be confirmed?" he queried.

"I just wish the hierarchical church, when they make a decision about doing overhauls would look at the whole, long picture. I'm 30 and the sacrament of confirmation has bounced around during my life.

" Until we look at the questions of infant baptism and if 7 and 8-year-olds need to receive Eucharist, we will not have dealt with